

FEDERAL GAS TAX FUND PROJECT SPOTLIGHT

THE MUNICIPALITY OF THE COUNTY OF RICHMOND'S

WASTEWATER MANAGEMENT PILOT PROJECT FOR ELECTORAL DISTRICTS 3 & 4

The Municipality of the County of Richmond

Incorporated: April 17, 1879

Population: 9,293 (2011 Census)

Project: Richmond County's Wastewater Management Pilot Project for Electoral Districts 3 & 4

Qualitative Benefits: Groundwater protection, ecological protection and environmental stability

Gas Tax Fund Contribution to the Project: \$120,000

Total Project Cost: \$300,000 (for 26 on-site systems)

Other Gas Tax Fund Projects Underway or Completed:

- Richmond Sewage Lift Station Upgrades - \$200,000
- Richmond Compost Facility Curing Pad Expansion - \$200,000

THE MUNICIPALITY OF THE COUNTY OF RICHMOND

Richmond County lies on the southwestern side of Cape Breton Island, bordered on the north by the Bras d'Or Lakes (a world-renowned sailing destination) and the Atlantic Ocean on the south. As a rural municipality, its 1,244 km² land mass includes large areas of forested land, surrounded by many miles of beautiful coastline. Several communities, including Arichat, St. Peter's and Point Tupper, serve as economic hubs and have much to offer in the form of businesses, services and industries. Richmond County is steeped in history and has a rich cultural heritage with its diverse and vibrant Mi'kmaq, Scottish and French-Acadian communities.



RICHMOND COUNTY'S WASTEWATER MANAGEMENT PILOT PROJECT

In 2004, Richmond County commissioned a study to explore viable solutions to replace a number of failed septic systems. When the study revealed that close to 80 per cent of residential septic systems in District 4 were malfunctioning or inadequate, the Municipality set out to find an innovative solution that would prove both fiscally responsible and ensure the protection of vulnerable groundwater resources.



The *Alternative Wastewater Committee* was formed to explore options that went beyond conventional sewers and a central wastewater treatment plant. As a rural municipality, residents are spread over a large geographical area, making a central system very cost prohibitive. After much consideration and consultation, the *Committee* determined that

individual onsite sewage disposal systems would provide the best option for Richmond County. The Municipality then began work on creating a wastewater pilot project for Districts 3 and 4 that would not only provide an innovative treatment solution, but also test different financial models to ensure ratepayers were offered the most economical option.

A key determinate to the pilot's success was ensure the Municipality had the authority to regulate the onsite systems, thus making it responsible for their construction, operation and maintenance. In order to facilitate this structure, it developed a Wastewater Management District (WMD) as a means to manage both public and private sewage disposal systems. Within the WMD, the Municipality has the authority to construct, inspect, repair and replace onsite systems, and establish charges for these services. The WMD also offers a mechanism to provide more flexible system designs and use alternative technologies to treat wastewater within Richmond County.

The Municipality designed the pilot to make it easy for residents to participate. Once an application has been approved, staff makes all the necessary arrangements to construct the onsite system, using local labour and materials whenever possible. Under the current pilot design, a homeowner pays 1/3 of the cost (approximately \$5,400) to have the system installed and the Municipality pays the remainder - through the

Gas Tax Fund and other revenue sources.

The Municipality then provides all ongoing maintenance for an annual fee of \$250.

“The onsite septic systems have allowed the Municipality to provide a sustainable alternative to a central collection and treatment facility - which would have had an estimated capital cost per household of \$36,000. This solution makes it more

affordable to residents, regardless of income” says Alvin Martell, Councillor for District 4 and long-time advocate for the project.



The response to the pilot has been very positive; the Municipality has installed 16 systems and has 10 more awarded for construction. As Deputy Warden Malcolm Beaton notes, *“The Wastewater Management Project will attract future development and build stronger sustainable communities. This innovative approach will have an enormous positive impact on both the environment and local groundwater.”*

As a result of its success, the pilot will transition into a 4-year program for which Richmond County has received sufficient funding through the *Building Canada Small Communities Fund* to install up to 200 individual systems. The determination and dedication of staff and council to find the best possible financial and environmental solution to fit the area’s rural nature has proven beneficial for the Municipality and its ratepayers alike!